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ABSTRACT

Since 1990, a long-term study has been following the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 21 schools in 4 rural school districts. This publication summarizes study findings through 1995. Findings across KERA strands suggest that reform would have been unlikely without KERA's extra funding, used to increase teacher salaries, hire additional personnel, and pay for instructional materials. KERA technology funds helped districts plan technology programs and buy hardware. The new high-stakes assessment program and the mandated ungraded primary program have been major drivers of instructional change. Although KERA was conceived as a unified, systemic program, implementation has been primarily strand by strand. Educators have concentrated on practicalities of implementation, rather than philosophical underpinnings. Different parts of the reform have been implemented with widely varying degrees of proficiency and philosophical acceptance. Local educators have too little time to reflect on KERA innovations and understand how the strands were designed to work together. Professional development opportunities have increased, but one-shot workshops still predominate. Communication among teachers and parents have also increased. A chart outlines degrees of implementation and acceptance of various KERA reforms. A supplement discusses findings specific to KERA strands: accountability, assessment, and instruction in grades 4-12 and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS); school-based decision making; ungraded primary program and continuous progress; and family resource and youth services centers. (SV)

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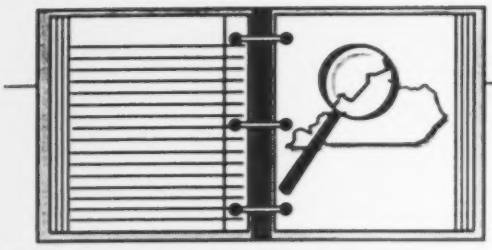

NOTES FROM THE FIELD:

Education Reform in Rural Kentucky

Volume 5, Number 1
February 1996

AEL

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Five Years of Education Reform in Rural Kentucky

Probably one of the greatest things . . . is we're on the same educational program that we were on in 1990. That's never happened before . . . . Before, every four years, we'd have four—maybe five—different entities that determined our program. Each superintendent of public instruction had things he or she wanted to do, each State Board had things they wanted to do, each governor had things that they wanted to do and then, of course, the General Assembly had things they wanted to do. So our program changed constantly . . . . We may get to the point one of these years in the future when we're going to fully determine what we want kids to learn at each grade level and each subject. I think we're on the road to that for the first time ever. [a Kentucky superintendent]

In this issue, we summarize the findings of our five-year study. We first discuss those that cut across KERA strands. Findings specific to particular KERA strands are reported in the center supplement.

Based on our study of 21 schools in four rural districts, the following areas are worthy of careful attention from policymakers.

Overall reform effort: After five years, KERA implementation is primarily strand by strand, rather than integrated as envisioned by those who designed the law.

Funding levels: Funding for SEEK and professional development is critical to continuing KERA implementation; funding for facilities appears to be inadequate in the four districts.

Time: Teachers are struggling to find time to meet their increased responsibilities.

Professional development: The emphasis on professional development is essential; ongoing support and technical assistance for teachers, as well as activities that allow them to plan, collaborate, reflect, and evaluate have proven to be more effective than one-shot workshops.

Accountability: Rewards and sanctions have had unintended negative consequences that have interfered with anticipated positive outcomes.

Primary program: Teachers' preoccupation with multi-age/multi-ability grouping has obscured its purpose as a tool for achieving continuous progress.

SBDM: Shared decisionmaking was impeded by inadequate training and the political disincentives attached to applying for alternative structures.

Parent involvement: Most parents and educators understand that KERA calls for increased parent involvement but do not know how it should look or how to bring it about.

Family Resource/Youth Services Centers: Based on the experience of the one district with centers in place, they were perceived as valuable by educators and families; the local autonomy built into the program seems essential to meeting each school's unique needs.

The Study

Since 1990, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory has been studying the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in four rural school districts: three county districts—from eastern, central, and western parts of the state—and one independent district. The purpose of the long-term study is to analyze the effects of large-scale changes in state policy and to report information on the consequences of reform to policymakers, educators, and scholars. Because many of the reform measures are espoused nationwide, this study may inform both state and national policymakers.

During this first five years, the research focused mainly on several KERA strands enacted under the curriculum section of the law*: the nongraded primary program, family resource centers and youth services centers, effects of the accountability measures in Grades 4-12, and school-based decisionmaking (SBDM). The study also examined the effects of the new funding formula on the districts.

Primary methods for gathering data included observation of key events, focused interviews,

(continued on page 2)

**The Act specifies reform measures in three areas: curriculum, governance, and finance.*

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Findings Across KERA Strands

Without the extra funding provided by KERA, it is unlikely that reform would or could have happened in the four study districts. The funding signaled the seriousness of the legislators' intent to support change and made KERA implementation possible.

Like many rural districts, the four study districts had limited funding, relatively low salaries, few special program staff, and few central office staff prior to KERA. After KERA, all four districts were able to increase salaries and hire additional staff. By the end of the study period, funding available through the new Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) formula had greatly increased the districts' capacity to provide instructional materials. Categorical funding—for example, family resource and youth services centers, preschool program, professional development (which increased from $1 per student to over $20 per student by 1995), and extended school services—made it possible for districts to offer programs and services otherwise unavailable in these rural schools. Even with the major funding increases, however, districts were not able to sufficiently alleviate teacher overburden created by KERA implementation or to fully meet needs for building renovation and construction.

KERA technology funds helped districts plan technology programs and obtain hardware. Prior to KERA, none of the districts had sufficient computer technology to provide more than a few students with regular access to computers or to assist with administration and management. After KERA, districts' use of technology increased to varying degrees. Districts that used local funds to supplement KERA funding progressed more rapidly than those that did not.

The new ***high-stakes assessment program*** and the ***mandated ungraded primary program have been the major drivers of instructional change***. Many teachers in the study districts adopted and accepted as valuable the emphasis on teaching writing, reinforced through the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), and some attributes of the primary program. A large quantity of professional development in these areas was available to teachers.

KERA was conceived as a unified, systemic reform in which all the pieces would work together to ensure that **all** students acquire higher-order skills and concepts. ***After five years, KERA implementation in the four districts is primarily strand by strand***, rather than integrated. At this early stage of reform, educators are ***concentrating on the practicalities of implementation rather than on the philosophical underpinnings*** of the reform. The scope of the reform and the rapid phase-in of its many parts, built into the legislation itself, reinforced this piecemeal implementation. Educators were required to implement new programs quickly, often without adequate professional development, time for planning, or an understanding of the philosophy undergirding either the reform package itself or its many parts. In addition, the Kentucky Department of Education was reorganized in 1991—as mandated by KERA—the same time that districts needed the most assistance with KERA implementation.

At the conclusion of the study's first five years, ***different parts*** of the reform package ***are being implemented with widely varying degrees of proficiency and***

(continued from page 1)

occasional surveys, and document review. To ensure validity of the findings, only data gathered from multiple sources form the basis of our conclusions. The four school districts, and the people interviewed and observed, were promised anonymity throughout the study; thus, no actual names are used in this report.

KIRIS

KERA abolished the state's standardized testing program and mandated the development of an annual performance-based assessment. The Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) consists of three components: writing and math portfolios, a "transitional" test containing open-response questions requiring written answers, and group performance events with an individual written component. The open-response and portfolio portions of the test are weighted far more heavily than performance events, which account for less than 20 percent of the overall score. Student performance on KIRIS is judged in terms of four performance categories: novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished.

Findings Specific to KERA Strands

Accountability, Assessment, and Instruction In Grades 4-12

KERA was designed as an assessment-driven reform, and ***the state assessment program is driving many curriculum and instruction decisions*** in the study districts. Most teachers tailored their curriculum to what is tested by the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)—with both positive and negative consequences.

An ***emphasis on writing is evident*** across all four districts and results from the heavy weighting of portfolios and open-response questions in the accountability formula. This emphasis ***received mixed reviews***. Many teachers said they would continue to emphasize writing regardless of KERA mandates because students' writing abilities greatly improved. But many also criticized KIRIS for assessing students' achievement almost entirely through writing. While teachers were enthusiastic about increasing the amount and quality of student writing, many said they felt that KIRIS requirements compelled them to have students polish writing portfolios past the point of instructional usefulness—often resulting in less time for teaching subject content.

The extent to which the accountability formula drove instruction was evident in other ways. Reform phase-in and KIRIS development occurred simultaneously, and teachers initially tended to emphasize cooperative learning in small groups as one way to prepare students for performance events. After teachers learned that performance events would not count heavily in the school's KIRIS scores, many de-emphasized cooperative learning and spent more classroom time producing portfolio selections and having students practice answering open-response questions.

Teachers in the four districts spent a lot of time preparing students for the KIRIS assessment, but ***assessment and instruction were integrated in only a few classrooms***. A small number of English and math teachers told us they used portfolio pieces, open-response questions, research papers, or performance events as the basis for classroom instruction and assessment. In these classrooms, instruction and assessment appeared to be seamless. This did not seem to be the case for most of the teachers we interviewed and observed. Generally, teachers continued their traditional testing practices and treated portfolio work and open-response practice as add-ons, often interrupting the flow of instruction. In such classrooms, an inordinate amount of time was spent on assessment, leading teachers to complain that they could not cover enough content in the time available.

The department of education produced several documents to assist teachers in aligning their instruction with the KERA goals and expectations on which KIRIS is based. These included a model curriculum framework (*Transformations*) and content guidelines. These documents were not especially effective; few teachers could find the time, encouragement, or support to become fully familiar with these supportive documents. Thus, most teachers relied primarily on the KIRIS test itself to guide instruction. Even though most schools in our study developed school transformation plans at the department's urging, few make use of them.

While it was clear that high-stakes accountability motivated teachers to change their classroom practice, they most often told us that ***fear of sanctions rather than promise of rewards motivated the changes***. Moreover, teachers said the sanctions denigrated their professionalism, and they were upset that students and parents were not held accountable in any way. Many also questioned the fairness and validity of the KIRIS assessment.

We were unable to discern any pattern across all four districts in how the study schools performed on KIRIS. At the end of the first accountability period, nine elementary schools in the four districts received rewards, six schools (including all four high schools) were successful in reaching their thresholds the second year of the biennium, and five schools improved but failed to meet their thresholds. No study schools were in decline. One district received rewards as a district, and another came close. But, overall,

High School Reform

High school restructuring was initiated by the State Board of Education a few years after KERA was passed. Although not a part of KERA, high school restructuring guidelines were very much consistent with the 1990 reform law. Unlike KERA, however, high school restructuring is being implemented on a volunteer basis as a pilot program with minimal funding, in hope that all high schools will eventually come on board. High school restructuring was progressing slowing in the four study districts. Only one district received a restructuring grant, and restructuring appeared to progress as slowly there as in the other three districts. Block scheduling and the Tech Prep program were the only restructuring efforts being implemented by the end of the study period, although some districts were preparing to implement the federally funded school-to-work program in 1995-96.

innovative schools scored no higher than traditional schools, small schools no higher than large schools, schools with assertive principal leadership no higher than those with more laissez-faire leadership; and outlying schools scored neither higher nor lower than centrally located schools. The one district that received rewards had a strong central office effort to help schools achieve their thresholds.

It may be too early in KERA implementation to expect a clear pattern of KIRIS performance. Although the accountability formula holds entire school faculties responsible for improvement of KIRIS scores, few schools exerted organized, schoolwide, long-term efforts to prepare students for KIRIS.

KIRIS scores caused ***several unintended negative consequences***. Teachers concentrated on comparing their school's results with those of others. Teachers tended to attribute their schools' performance on KIRIS to a combination of factors within the school's control (e.g., good or poor teaching) and factors outside the school's control (e.g., students' home environments or students' innate abilities). Many respondents at both reward and non-reward schools cited both kinds of factors. In all four districts, many allegations were made that successful schools cheated. In only one or two highly successful schools did teachers appear to feel they understood how to maintain their level of improvement. When educators did not have a clear sense of what accounted for success, they sometimes resorted to counterproductive strategies to raise KIRIS scores. In one district, for instance, teachers reported that a disproportionate number of low-achieving primary students were retained one year for fear they would lower the school's fourth-grade KIRIS scores. In other districts, several educators spoke of the temptation to ignore students who were not expected to improve above the novice category.

The ***philosophy that virtually all children can and should achieve at high levels*** undergirds the curriculum section of KERA. Many of the curriculum changes that teachers made reflected this philosophy. Even so, the premise was very ***difficult for both educators and parents to accept***. In 1994-95, we began asking many of those we interviewed if they agreed that all children should be expected to achieve at high levels. Eighty-five percent said no. A few teachers said they had changed their opinions as a result of observing rapid progress in children of whom they expected very little. Many teachers said that all children could accomplish more than they had been expected to accomplish in the past; however, most added that this did not mean all children could reach the "proficient" level on the KIRIS assessment.

It is clear that teacher practice is changing faster than teacher beliefs. One teacher told us:

> I've always felt like I had enough experience with children to know which ones to push, which ones to encourage, which ones to say, "I can't accept this." Now I have to push every one of them because it's not that they're accountable, I'm accountable.

Accountability

Schools are expected to demonstrate a specified level of improvement in student achievement on KIRIS over each two-year period. Scores of the various components of the assessment are weighted to produce an index, and the indices are averaged over two years. After 20 years, all schools are expected to score at the proficient level, on average. At the end of each biennium, schools that score higher than their target scores (or "thresholds") and that move at least 10 percent of the students scoring "novice" to a higher performance category receive financial rewards. Schools that fail to reach their thresholds or decline in performance are sanctioned. Sanctions involve, at the least, developing a school improvement plan and receiving state assistance. At the most, the school is placed on probation, an outside administrator called a Kentucky Distinguished Educator is brought in to help the school improve—with authority to fire any or all staff after six months—and students may transfer to the nearest successful school. The most severe sanctions, initially scheduled to be imposed at the end of the 1993-94 biennium, were delayed two years by the legislature. This gave educators more time for professional development related to the various KERA strands and everyone more experience with the reform itself.

School-Based Decisionmaking

Governance shifted to the school level, but only in some cases was the council the primary instrument for school decisionmaking. Because SBDM was time consuming and some administrators were threatened by the prospect of sharing governance, teachers in some schools never voted to implement SBDM. Even in SBDM schools, some councils were little more than rubber stamps for the principals' decisions, especially in schools where teachers felt they had adequate informal input into decisionmaking.

SBDM is extremely time consuming. In several schools, it was difficult to find teachers willing to serve on committees or on the council for this reason.

The ***degree of shared decisionmaking*** within councils ***varied***, mostly due to differences in principals' willingness to share authority and ability to facilitate consensual decisionmaking. When council membership changed—especially when a new principal was chosen—the mode of decisionmaking in the school generally changed also, sometimes becoming more democratic and sometimes less. SBDM became institutionalized (e.g., part of the school culture) at only one of the 12 SBDM schools in the study. At this school, the council continued to take primary responsibility for school governance and student

achievement, even when council membership changed completely. ***Parents were the group most often left out of the decisionmaking process*** at most schools, in part because they lacked access to schools' information and informal communication networks and in part because few educators felt that parents should be full partners in decisionmaking.

School councils varied widely in the types of decisions they made. Within each district, however, some district norms appeared to operate. For instance, in one district all councils were highly involved in school decisionmaking; in another, none of the councils assumed responsibility for the school budget. In general, councils that assumed responsibility for the budget were more deeply involved in school decisionmaking than those that did not. Councils most commonly made decisions about council operations, personnel, budget, curriculum/instruction, discipline, scheduling, and school facilities. Councils made few decisions about assignment of instructional/non-instructional time, student assignment, use of space, staffing, student support services, student assessment, professional development, and parent/community participation.

We could discern ***no consistent development over time in the types and content of decisions that councils made.*** We found no general trend toward making more decisions about curriculum and instruction, no clear tendency to move from making operational decisions to policy decisions, and no strong tendency for councils to make decisions in the same areas over time. The failure of most councils to progress toward making policy decisions that affected students seemed to be due, in large part, to turnover of council members and lack of across-the-board investment in SBDM, which resulted in the failure of councils to develop an "institutional memory" that carried over from one council to another.

SBDM training was problematic. Councils received training to orient new members to SBDM but did not seek out ongoing professional development and technical assistance. Different trainers sometimes provided different advice on statutes, regulations, and best practices.

Information about council decisions was not publicized in local media, and councils did not consistently take steps to make their meetings accessible to parents and the general public.

School-Based Decisionmaking

To enable schools to determine their specific needs and make changes needed to reach their thresholds, KERA established school-based decisionmaking (SBDM). In schools that adopt SBDM, a council with a specified structure (three teachers, two parents, and the principal who serves as chair) is elected annually, although councils may apply to the state board of education for alternative structures. School councils are empowered to make decisions to enhance student achievement in many areas, including hiring a principal, consulting with the principal in filling staff vacancies, developing the school's instructional budget, and setting policies on curriculum, instruction, discipline, student assignment, staff assignment, scheduling, use of space, and extracurricular programs. A two-thirds favorable vote by a school's teachers is required for adoption of SBDM. As of July 1996, all schools that have not reached their thresholds (unless they are the only school in the district) must implement SBDM.

Primary Program

During the past three years, most primary teachers seemed to think they were implementing the primary program if they changed instruction to make it more developmentally appropriate, adopted multi-age grouping, and changed the way they reported students' progress to parents. These were the "critical attributes" in which primary teachers received the most training and the clearest mandates. Few educators thought continuous progress—the most critical of the seven "critical attributes"—was feasible without a great deal more help in managing relatively large, extremely diverse groups of students and keeping accurate track of students' progress.

Most teachers implemented developmentally appropriate practices enthusiastically because they could see the benefits. Multi-age grouping and qualitative reporting to parents were implemented more grudgingly and mechanically. Inclusion of kindergarten students in the primary program was generally unpopular and even abandoned by two schools. ***Continuous progress was not effectively implemented in any of the study schools. Even so, the stigma attached to slow progress in the early school years decreased*** through the de-emphasis on testing and grading and multi-age grouping.

In all four districts, primary ***teachers attempted authentic assessment but had great difficulty keeping up with the paperwork.*** Also, many teachers did not find this sort of assessment useful enough to justify the extra time and effort, because they were not philosophically convinced the new form of assessment was an improvement.

Educators were generally dissatisfied with the new methods of reporting student progress to parents, and many reported that

Primary Program

The nongraded program (replacing grades K-3) is designed to eliminate early school failure by allowing students to progress through the program at their own rate. Primary programs must include seven "critical attributes:" developmentally appropriate practices, multi-age/multi-ability classrooms, continuous progress, authentic assessment, qualitative reporting methods, professional teamwork, and positive parent involvement.

parents preferred traditional number or letter grades to qualitative reporting. Among the few parents who spoke to this issue in 1994-95, about two-thirds said they disliked the new method of reporting. Regular parent-teacher conferences alleviated some of these complaints. Teachers viewed conferences as helpful, though time consuming.

Only one study district mandated full implementation of the *Kentucky Early Learning Profile (KELP)* assessment/reporting system in all primary programs. Teachers said the system was time consuming and required a great deal of paperwork, but allowed them to track student progress very accurately. Some principals felt KELP made continuous progress feasible, for the first time. In ***spite of the clear benefits of KELP***, however, ***most teachers said it was so burdensome they would discontinue using*** all or parts of ***it, given a choice***.

Most schools provided common planning time for teams of primary teachers, but never more than one hour a day and usually closer to an hour a week. The time was often used for individual planning rather than professional teamwork. In some schools, teachers frequently planned together during program startup, but did less common planning as the program became established. At some schools, the practice died out altogether. Organization of the primary program into K-3 "families" facilitated professional teamwork but was never universal and was implemented less and less in most of the study schools. In one new school, open classrooms built to house K-3 primary "families" assisted teachers in implementing professional teamwork and flexible grouping/regrouping.

Most schools made initial efforts to increase parent involvement in the primary program, ***but maintained few efforts over time***. Programs with paid parent involvement coordinators were most successful. KELP parent-teacher conferences and primary curricula requiring parents to work with children at home also increased parent involvement.

In most schools, there was a marked ***lack of continuity in curriculum and instruction between the primary program and in the fourth grade***. Very little regular communication occurred between primary and fourth-grade teachers. This lack of continuity seems to be inherent in the KERA legislation. Full implementation of the KELP program helped bridge this gap in one district. Over time, many primary teachers in all four districts changed their instruction to emphasize writing as a way to prepare students for the fourth-grade KIRIS assessment.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers

Lack of access to clear and accurate information about how to apply for centers, coupled with inability or unwillingness to make centers a priority, affected three of the four districts' ability to obtain centers during the study period. Only one district established centers during the five years.

In that district, the school staff and students' families greatly appreciated the centers, which provided services intended to help students do better in school. School nurses were the most valued service provided by family resource centers. Nurses saved instructional time for teachers and students and kept some medically fragile children in school.

The director is key to successful center operations. Training and networking of directors seemed somewhat haphazard, and some directors needed additional training. Most teachers appreciated the centers but were not deeply involved in their operation. The per-pupil funding formula caused problems for small centers, which required the same basic staff as larger centers.

The family resource centers we studied increased parent involvement in schools by providing social functions and adult education classes, serving as parent advocates with teachers and principals, and encouraging parents to serve as volunteers in centers and classrooms.

Local autonomy was an essential element in centers' ability to meet local needs. The needs assessment procedures required for center applications helped educators and parents plan and work together to identify and try to meet the most urgent local needs. State-level mandates, such as a recent decision to fund no new positions for school nurses, seemed to undermine important local priorities in the district we studied.

Dual lines of authority (supervision by both the Cabinet on Human Resources and local boards of education) caused problems for center directors. The agencies' policies were often different and occasionally contradictory.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers

Family resource centers (elementary schools) and youth services centers (middle and high schools) are integrated service centers located at or near all schools in which the number of at-risk students is 20 percent or more of the student body. The centers are designed to coordinate or provide services to help students overcome social, emotional, and physical barriers to learning. Because the centers have not yet been fully funded, schools must go through a competitive grant process to receive funding for centers. The Cabinet for Human Resources is the state-level agency responsible for the centers, which are locally supervised by boards of education.

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philosophical acceptance. Only a few of the KERA innovations are well integrated into school culture. (See box on categories of implementation and acceptance.)

Local ***educators have too little time to reflect*** on the KERA innovations ***and understand*** how the strands were designed to work together. Rather, time demands for implementing one strand conflict with time demands for implementing another. For instance, during the primary program's planning and first year of implementation, few primary teachers felt they had the time to run for positions on school councils; faculty at some schools reported postponing SBDM adoption until primary teachers had time to participate.

Professional development opportunities generally increased in number and quality as a result of KERA. One-shot workshops, however, continue to be the predominant form of professional development. Moreover, many teachers were overwhelmed by the amount of training they received, felt they needed time to try out new strategies in their classrooms before learning more, and resented the amount of time they were required to spend away from their students to receive professional development. In general, teachers preferred being taught by practitioners who had actual classroom experience with the innovation. One of the four study districts was frequently successful with the training-of-trainers strategy, so that teachers received much of their professional development from

Degrees of Implementation and Acceptance of Various KERA Reforms

Considerable degree of implementation and acceptance: Becoming institutionalized; educators see and value the benefits of the innovation; most often areas of intense professional development; fit teachers' pre-existing beliefs; would probably continue without KERA mandate.

- Specific, child-centered instructional practices in primary program
- General shift of governance to school level, though not necessarily through formal SBDM
- Increased emphasis on writing throughout the curriculum

Moderate degree of implementation and acceptance: Implemented without much philosophical change; fit teachers' pre-existing beliefs; might not continue without KERA mandates and funding.

- Parent involvement in primary program
- Open-response questions
- Family resource centers and youth services centers
- Extended school services program

Moderate degree of implementation but not well accepted: Generally implemented, but not necessarily seen as needed; insufficient professional development; might not continue without KERA.

- Multi-age grouping and authentic assessment in the primary program
- Curriculum additions to ensure students were taught subjects tested on the KIRIS
- Parent involvement in school-based decisionmaking

Not well implemented or accepted: Most challenging of the innovations; educators either did not believe in them or did not understand them.

- Continuous progress and professional teamwork in the primary program
- Integration of instruction and assessment
- Acceptance of the philosophy that all children can achieve at high levels

Use of school-based decisionmaking councils and qualitative reporting in the primary program were difficult to categorize; the degree of implementation in different districts and schools varies widely.

their peers. Teachers who had been trained to train others, however, were sometimes resented by their colleagues and often did not have time to share with their peers what they had learned.

Communication among teachers increased in the study schools through their work on school-based decisionmaking councils, school and district committees, and student portfolios. Also, classroom and special education teachers collaborate more, as pull-out programs for special education students decrease. Team teaching and instructional collaboration among regular classroom teachers, however, occurred irregularly and in only a few places.

Parent involvement in education increased, prompted by required parent participation in the primary program, school-based decisionmaking, superintendent screening committees, and family resource and youth services centers. In general, however, ***a barrier still exists between schools and parents, and parent involvement in school-based decisionmaking is often token.***

This synthesis of findings is part of a qualitative study of education reform in rural Kentucky being conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to provide feedback to educators and policymakers on the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Four researchers are documenting reform efforts in four rural Kentucky districts that have been assigned the pseudonyms of Lamont County, Newtown Independent, Orange County, and Vanderbilt County. For more information about this project, contact Pam Coe (800/624-9120) or Patty Kannapel (502/581-0324), AEL, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348.

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